

# Files note past problems at Systech's Franklin plant

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Franklin Chronicle has, for years, published articles about the historic odor problems that emanated from the south end of the city.

Following is the first article that introduces another problem that complicates conditions at the abandoned Systech site.

New and recently acquired information reveals that a water contamination problem that degraded the underground water supply was also discovered at the site.

Following, from official files, The Chronicle offers an account of the water contamination problem and further details on the odor problem.

By PHILIP JACKSON  
CHRONICLE Publisher

In February, Franklin city council approved a contract for a minimum of \$15,900 for testing procedures at the former Systech Waste Treatment Center, located on Baxter Drive off S.R. 73.

Several city officials have stated that their decision to have the soil and the ground water on the property tested is to insure that there isn't any problems with contamination caused by the industrial wastes that were disposed at the site

when the plant was in operation.

As a result of council's action, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency in Dayton has also shown interest by advancing the site to the top of its CERCLIS list.

The CERCLIS list, according to OEPA official Scott Shane, is the agency's Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensatory Liability Inventory System.

BY MOVING to the top of the list, Shane said the Franklin site will be the next one to be reviewed by the agency.

The OEPA investigation, however, will consist only of a review of documents concerning past activities and any problems which may have occurred. The finished report, he said, will be forwarded to the federal EPA for review.

If federal officials discover any potential problems after reviewing the report, a full investigation of the site may be ordered.

Severe and obnoxious odor problems have been reported for years by Franklin residents as coming from the vicinity of the Systech plant, the Solid Waste Plant, and the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

IN ADDITION to the sickening odors, another problem was also uncovered at

the Systech site.

The Franklin Chronicle has learned that in 1977 groundwater was contaminated and polluted. This information came after review of public records at the OEPA, the Southwestern Ohio Air Pollution Control Division, and the City of Franklin.

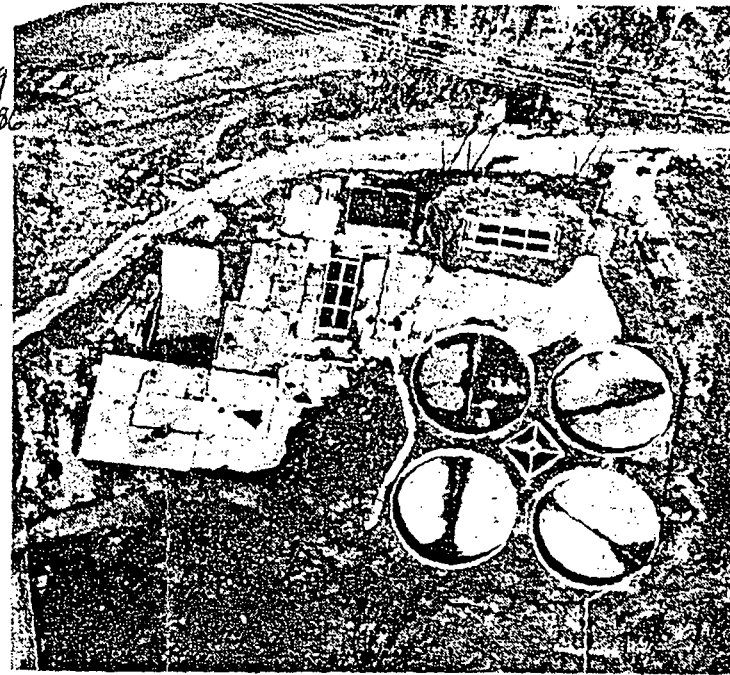
Records also show that in 1978, a local geology review indicated that underground, a permeable section was the recipient of contamination in an approximate 10-foot thick interval of coarse sand.

The Chronicle has documented that the affected wells were to be monitored and water samples tested at least as late as the year 1981.

REPORTS FROM agencies, and private consulting firms note that the Miami Conservancy District, operator of the Wastewater Treatment Plant in Franklin, and the OEPA were concerned with the contamination problems in late 1977. This was due to a reported spill of synthetic organics at the site.

Their concerns resulted in the drilling of several test wells labeled as W132, W133, W139 and W140 at the Systech site for the purpose of monitoring the quality of the water in the aquifer.

The wells of major concern seemed to be wells 139 and 140. It was in these two



Aerial view of former Systech plant

wells that the contamination was apparently prevalent.

The exact date, or dates of contamination, the source, the extent, the time officials became aware of the problem,

and how the contaminants were introduced into the aquifer are still unknown to The Chronicle.

See "FILES" page 3



FILE COPY

# Files note various problems at Systech...

Continued from page 1

Ongoing attempts to gain this information from OEPA and MCD officials have been unsuccessful.

AN ANALYSIS of groundwater in a report from MCD to Systech of Nov. 29, 1977 indicate the different chemicals present in the water.

The contaminating chemicals are not designated in the report, but consultants contacted by The Chronicle say that the presence of several of those chemicals listed on the report warrant concern.

Among the substances found in the groundwater during testing procedures were Cyanide, Nickel Ni, Chromium Cr, Arsenic, Cadmium Cd, Lead Pb, and Trichloroethane.

Concentrations of these chemicals appear to be slight (in the hundredths to thousandths of milligrams per liter). Even with these small amounts decontamination was necessary.

Pumping procedures of wells 139 and 140 were initiated in an attempt to reduce the chemical content in the soil and water.

THE WATER from these wells was originally intended for discharge into Clear Creek. However, due to OEPA concern that the water could possibly cause a fish kill, the water was delivered to MCD's facility for treatment rather than being discharged into Clear Creek.

In February of 1978, an OEPA report stated that sample data "indicated high chemical oxygen demand (COD) and the presence of weathered gasoline" in water from well 139.

In another report on Mar. 15, 1978, the OEPA "discovered a strong hydrogen sulfide odor emanating from the well water."

In the same report, the OEPA noted that "if concentrations of contaminants are reduced after 30 days pumping, then we can assume that the groundwater problem is only local. If concentrations remain the same or increase, then further investigation may be required."

That investigation did continue.

RECORDS OBTAINED from city of Franklin files show reports of chemical spills as early as June of 1975. Whether or not this spill contributed to water contamination is not known.

A letter to concerned citizens from city manager Bernard Eichholz detailed a meeting of July 18, 1975 and cited the existence of a number of problems.

The letter noted that a number of citizens were present. Among them was Lee Young, now deceased, the spokesman for southend residents.

This group was united in efforts to end the odor problems that they and other Franklin residents had endured for many years. They claimed the odor had increased since Systech's operation began in the city.

OTHERS ATTENDING were Eichholz, Systech representatives, and officials from MCD and the Black Clawson Company, the operator of the Solid Waste Recovery Plant, located adjacent to MCD's wastewater treatment plant.

Discussed at the meeting were five sources of odor problems at the site of Systech's plant, the wastewater treatment plant, and the solid waste plant. Sources of odor mentioned were soy bean oil, corn protein, sewage sludge, and garbage odors.

A fifth source of odor discussed was the chemical metha methacrylate. According to the memo read at that July 18, 1975 meeting "...on an evening, approximately 45 days ago, the pump broke which transfers the material (metha methacrylate) from a tanker truck to a Systech tank. The operator of the tanker truck and Systech's on duty employee then emptied the remaining 100 gallons into an open pit. This, of course, caused very pungent odors. Strict instructions have been given to all Systech employees that such operations will not be tolerated in the future. Systech has also provided more closed storage space for this material."

Metha methacrylate was also responsible for another odor problem in the summer of 1978. The second incident proved to be Franklin's worst encounter with odor problems, apparently caused

by the heavy concentration of acrylates.

THE ODOR from this incident was so widespread, it covered a substantial portion of Franklin and even extended into several areas of Middletown.

Official explanations into what caused the offensive odor differ.

Thomas Wittmann, president of Systech, in a letter to Franklin City Manager Robert Homan, in 1979, explained the history of his local plant.

Wittmann wrote: "An unfortunate odor incident occurred in Franklin during the summer of 1978, and serious economic losses have resulted..."

"IT WAS found that one of Systech's client companies had erroneously shipped material to the Franklin plant that should have been directed to another type facility," the letter continued. "Actually the problem occurred in the solvent recovery operation. Materials of this nature are more volatile than others and have greater odor-causing potential."

The official OEPA investigation report, however, differs from Wittmann's account of the incident.

The OEPA report filed Aug. 18, 1978 by Ken M. Harsh, (now working out of the Columbus office), stated that the investigation had been "ongoing for several weeks."

Harsh's report said that the products spilled were "acrylates (methyl), benzene, toluene, other solvents." The cause and/or sources listed in Harsh's report was "dumping of materials inside a diked area."

IN COMMENTS written at the end of the report, Harsh said, "Systech made a major boo-boo. They may have ruined their business, and they did ruin their local reputation."

"They had two 12,000 gallon storage tanks filled with old paints and solvents that had been sitting there for about three years," Harsh's comments continued. "They wanted to use the tanks and could not get the contents out through 2 1/2-inch drain valves so they took off the manhole covers and let the contents gurgel out into the dikes."

"The materials were eventually cleaned out of the dikes — but boy did they stink," Harsh wrote. "Odors were reported clear into Middletown. Probably the worst odors were from the acrylates — but there could have been almost any solvent."

"As a result of this spill, Systech closed its doors 8-18-78 and may never reopen," Harsh wrote. "Franklin city council may try to run them out on a 'rail' so to speak because of this problem. At any rate they were cleaning up the dike area, and the whole area on 8-18 and must get their act together."

THE AIR Pollution Control report dated the same month said "...fumes can be smelled all the way to Middletown..." The report blamed the odor on "acetones, methyl methacrylate and several other solvents in sludge that was dumped while cleaning the tank, also other leaking drums..."

While the incident was taking place at the Systech plant, MCD and OEPA officials were still trying to decontaminate the groundwater and the pumping and purging of wells and water sampling tests continued.

MCD has 28 "observation" or "sampling" wells in the Franklin area of which four are in Carlisle, one in the Miami view subdivision and one on Thirkield Avenue.

Two wells, W106 and W107, are near Franklin's municipal water fields on Franklin-Trenton Road. These two wells are approximately 3,000 to 3,500 feet northeast of the center of the abandoned Systech site.

THE REMAINING 20 MCD wells are drilled within the acreage surrounding the Wastewater Treatment Facility Sewage Treatment Plant at the south end of Franklin off Baxter Drive.

The four problem wells were W132, W133, W139 and W140 and are on the land leased by Systech from MCD.

Early indications of problems at the site appeared in a letter dated Dec. 23, 1977 from Donald T. Williams of MCD to Wittmann where three wells were mentioned:

## FIELD OBSERVATIONS

W132 — After development flow was clear and had no discernable odor.

W133 — After development flow was clear and had no discernable odor.

W139 — Water foamed during development with compressed air and remained turbid after three hours of pumping. A strong chemical odor was observed and the water was found to irritate the skin."

Efforts to decontaminate the groundwater at the site continued through 1980.

Williams, who kept a daily log of the day's activities, recorded on Feb. 20, 1980, a meeting with OEPA and Systech officials concerning the decontamination process of the groundwater at the Systech plant.

In his log, Williams wrote, "meeting with Tom Wittmann, Charlie Forsthoft, Walt Meinert who is Systech's consultant, Suhre and Plummer sat in."

"This was a full blown discussion on the progress made to date toward decontamination of the groundwater under the Systech plant."

"CHARLIE FORSTHOFF expressed some real reservations about the continued pumping of the site. He felt considerable progress had been made in reducing the level of contamination that Systech should not be required to continue pumping."

"Walt Meinert, their consultant and Dr. Howard of Howard Lab, who also accompanied Tom Wittmann, both felt that tremendous progress had been made."

"I took the position that we had to guard the quality of the groundwater, that we were the owners of the property, and that we must ensure that everything possible was done to protect the resource."

"I suggested to Tom Wittmann that he have a report prepared by Walt Meinert and Dr. Howard and submit to me with

their recommendations. If they both recommend that no further pumping be done, I would be willing to bring this to the attention of the General Manager to get a formal written opinion from the OEPA. After that, we would reach some decision."

A REPORT from Meinert of Grand Rapids, Mi., dated June 17, 1980, and from Howard Laboratories in Dayton dated July 29, 1980, both confirm that groundwater contamination was present at the Systech site in 1977. The conclusion of these reports was that pumping procedures should be discontinued.

In response to the reports, Williams said, "you may stop pumping procedures effective this date (Aug. 21, 1980). The District will require that both wells be pumped for one day and tested to determine the condition of the groundwater at the site on a quarterly basis through August 1981. Depending upon the results of these tests the requirements for testing will be reexamined at that time."

The extent of the water contamination at the Systech site and/or any threat or danger that it may, or may not have posed to the underground water supply of Franklin is a matter that The Chronicle will continue to study.

And there wasn't any evidence uncovered from the various files that the city wells were contaminated.

In February, Franklin City Council hired Soil and Material Engineers, of Fairfield, to test the soil and water in April for possible contamination at the site.

IN THE Feb. 26, edition of the Chronicle, interim city manager Mrs. Betty Grizzell said council has "had it (testing at Systech) on its project list for some time."

She said the decision to test the area for contamination at this time centered on "timing and funding." She also said in the Feb. 26 edition that the testing to take place was not prompted by a recent discovery of contamination at the site. She said the testing is being done "in order to confirm that there is no problem at the site."